CHAPTER 11

ALLIED EXPEDITIONARY FORCES BROADCASTING

The Allied Expeditionary Forces Program had access to the best of radio entertainment from Britain, Canada and the United States. BBC Director Maurice Gorham spent considerable time trying to keep the right balance between the three nationalities. "There was little finesse about these meetings of ours," he recalls, "and everybody emerged rather battered." Ultimately, the U. S. American Forces Network provided about fifty percent of the programming with the other half coming from the BBC and the CBC.(1)

Initially, AEFP had to rely on materials coming from each of the broadcast services. Gorham wanted to carry out General Eisenhower's goal of a unified service. So, he "was very keen on having some joint programs where British and American voices broadcasted together, instead of each having a program in turn." From the beginning, the news side of the operation did just that. As agreed between SHAEF and the BBC, the news on the AEFP came from BBC news facilities. Announcers from AFN, BBC and CBC read the news from all three countries throughout the broadcast day, alternating every hour on the hour from 5:55 AM until 11:00 PM. Announcers from all three nations also did the informational spots.(2)

FIRST JOINT PROGRAMMING

An effort to provide more in-depth coverage of military developments led to the first joint programming. On July 4, AEFP celebrated the American's Independence Day with a special two-way program. Staff members British Lieutenant Colonel David Niven and U.S. Captain Franklin Engelmann interviewed British, American and Canadian troops at Normandy as part of a composite program. It included a direct shortwave broadcast from the United States. This was a one-time event, however.

On a regular basis, the most successful AEFP original program was "Combat Diary," a daily round-up of war news. "Combat Diary" provided first-hand accounts of events in the local theater and the other fronts. Occasionally, they'd spotlight a particular unit and its achievements since D-Day. The program ran seven-days-a-week from July 3, 1944, until after V-E Day (May 8, 1945). Captain Jack London of AFN handled most of the narration and Captain Royston Morley, a former BBC producer and war correspondent, edited the program during its entire run. A changing team of American and Canadian uniformed radio men assisted them. Stories were contributed by war correspondents and fighting men from all three countries. Edited "by soldiers for soldiers," the program had great popularity among the troops as they moved across Europe.

"Combat Diary" also attracted the attention of other reporters who listened to the program and began contributing to it. To Maurice Gorham, the best part of the program was having one nationality reporting on another -- a BBC man covering Patton's Army or an American writing on the British air war. "Combat Diary" also brought to many of the correspondents the new experience of having their reports heard by the men about whom they were writing. This "particularly impressed the American reporters, who were used to sending cables to their home newspapers or speaking over the radio-telephone to New York. They now found their pieces being broadcast within a few hours to the very units whose actions they'd described and amongst whom they were still living."(3)

A memorandum was written on July 6, 1944, to AFN Commander John Hayes from Major Arthur Goodfriend, Chief of the Orientation Branch of the U. S. Command and later Officer-in-Charge of *Stars and Stripes*. It captures the initial impact of the AEFP operation on the troops in the field. Goodfriend arrived in Normandy shortly after the initial landings on the second day of a four-day storm that was interfering with the unloading of ammunition and supplies. Rain was coming down in sheets. The wind was blowing at more than forty miles per hour. It was "about as dismal a scene as I ever recall, and I've seen such things as the Quetta earthquake in India and Monsoons in the Indian Ocean. With all that rain coming everywhere, cooks had a hard time preparing food. When they did, the water poured onto the plates, and the enlisted men huddled around vehicles in the near vicinity, in a vain attempt to find protection."

Other than the cook shack, Goodfriend found only one other shelter. It was a piece of canvas protecting "something exceptionally precious, something which even under the circumstances had to be kept dry." As the men began to eat, the sound of music came out of the crude shelter.

"It was strange music. It was jive -- American jive! I never did find out whose jive it was, but it was gay, rhythmic, and in no time at all it had us feeling 100-percent better. The wind and the rain got all mixed up with the music. It distorted it a little, but in the main the reception was good. Wonder of wonders, it was hooked to a loudspeaker that gave it the volume it needed to compete with the noises of the beach. We could hear it clearly where we sat. All around us we could see others

pricking up their ears and smiling as they ate and listened to the music of that radio."

"We forgot the rain. We forgot our rations. We forgot our soaked clothes. We forgot about the destruction and dislocation on the beach. We felt revived and confident. If Americans could listen to music in those terrible conditions, things could not be so bad." As the programming continued during the afternoon and soldiers passed into the range of the loud-speaker, Goodfriend observed he could see "their shoulders straighten and their faces relax. It made the whole job easier."

In warranted exaggeration, Goodfriend wrote that this was "the day when the Army beat both the Germans and the elements. The radio and the cheer it brought to the boys on the beach played a big role in that victory." He felt "proud when the brief announcement identified the music as part of the American Forces Network service over the Allied Expeditionary Forces Program." Armed Forces Radio was achieving its purpose.

When Tom Lewis read the Goodfield report, he forwarded it to his staff. He told them, "It expresses your objective in more practical and more human terms than anything I've yet read on the subject. It expresses, too, the only promise we ever made to you at AFRS -- a sense of fulfillment for the long hours of thought and work you've poured into this operation."(4)

GLENN MILLER

Gorham continued to work toward his goal of using the programs from the individual services to supplement the jointly-produced shows. His most successful effort was the regular broadcasts by uniformed bands from each military service. Major Glenn Miller brought an all-star organization from the United States, Captain Robert Farnon conducted the Canadian band and R.S.M. George Melachrino led the British musicians. Leading entertainers like Bing Crosby and Dinah Shore, appeared with the bands in spectacular inter-Allied shows.

Glenn Miller, the most popular band leader of the day, joined the Army shortly after Pearl Harbor and directed a band for the U.S. Air Forces Training Command. On arrival in England, the service officially designated his group the American Band of the Supreme Allied Command. Even though their primary assignment was to broadcast on AEFP, Miller's band made personal appearances at benefits, hospitals and military bases. Besides the major broadcast each Thursday night, small groups from the forty member band played regularly scheduled programs on other evenings. A twenty-piece string section, for example, did a quarter-hour program called "Strings with Wings" on Mondays and Wednesdays.

Despite the excellent reception of his music broadcasts, Miller discussed his views with Gorham. In particular, he cited the problems Gorham had in dealing with the Americans during his tenure as head of AEFP. Miller didn't know much about the organization. He'd thought he'd be directing his own program instead of merely supplying a band. Gorham admits he compounded the problem by trying to integrate Miller's programs to give them an inter-allied flavor. "We gave him the best soloists Britain had, thinking that it'd appeal to everybody to hear Vera Lynn or Anne Shelton singing with his band. He didn't want them. He had his own formula and found it hard to fit them in."(5)

Time helped Miller and Gorham understand each other better. Gorham agreed with Miller's scheme of transcribing his radio broadcasts, which he'd been doing for his weekly shows. This gave him more time to appear at bases throughout the British Isles. It provided backup if lines weren't available for live broadcasts. Gorham's influence within SHAEF helped Miller travel to Paris to do live broadcasts from the French capital.

Eisenhower's headquarters initially turned down Miller's request to go to Paris, citing the difficulty of securing landlines to carry the program back to England. When he finally got the arrangements, Gorham told Miller, "Now, Glenn, there's only one more thing. For heaven's sake, make sure that boat they put you on is seaworthy. We don't want to lose you all!"

In response, Miller told the AEFP director, "You don't have to worry. You'll have the recordings anyway!"(6) That quip would prove prophetic.

Miller's band flew safely to Paris where they prepared for a live Christmas show. Miller himself hitched a ride with an American Colonel aboard a single-engine plane.

It vanished at sea.

America was staggered by the news and the continuing mystery surrounding the death of the revered bandleader. For AEFP, it produced a crisis of another kind. Gorham knew Miller was missing, but he couldn't report it in Europe until SHAEF made the announcement. What about the Christmas show?

AEFP continued to use Miller's programs transcribed with his voice until SHAEF reported the news on Christmas Eve. Finally, they made the announcement. Having secured lines from Paris, AEFP broadcast the Christmas Program live as scheduled with Miller's deputy leading the band. Gorham saw Miller's loss as a "tremendous blow to the American troops. It was sad news for me too, for after our early clashes we'd got on good terms. I respected his workmanship and the tremendous trouble he took to get his results."(7)

Miller wasn't the only American who had difficulty understanding the AEFP operation. According to Gorham, he was "never sure whether Ed Kirby quite realized that SHAEF had abandoned their original plan

and that the BBC was running the program, not he and SHAEF." Kirby was "more interested in formats than in policy. He was only happy when he was in a studio." Gorham considered him "more of a sponsor than a military adviser. Like so many sponsors he had no idea how to judge a script. He worked entirely on `dry runs.'" To keep Kirby happy, Gorham obtained as many recording disks as Kirby wanted, despite their shortage. "Kirby would just disappear into the studios and cut records happily for hours."(8)

Dealing with AFN was another matter.

In England, AFN continued to function under the control of the American Command known as ETOUSA (European Theatre of Operations U.S. Army). Unlike Eisenhower and SHAEF, ETOUSA didn't want AEFP in the first place. They believed, like AFRS' Tom Lewis, that the American Forces Network could give American troops whatever they needed. ETOUSA believed that the more AEFP sounded like AFN the better. They were not exactly fans of Gorham's operation.

Gorham recalled, "At all times I had to have my eyes very wide open in dealing with AFN."(9)

Gorham had a long friendship with Johnny Hayes, the commander of AFN. Hayes and AFN had all the AFRS programs. While they never allocated any full-time personnel to AEFP, Hayes' group gave Gorham all the programming he could use and then some. Gorham found him "too business-like to be uncooperative." Throughout their move across Europe, American troops in the field had problems with AEFP, too. Just like AFRS' Lewis had feared, when he argued for separate broadcast services, the BBC control of the operation had a negative impact on U. S. troop morale.

G.I.'S SPEAK OUT

True Boardman had been on a fact-finding mission for the Chief of Special and Information Services of the U. S. Forces in Europe. When he returned on January 22, 1945, he provided a detailed analysis of the effectiveness of the AEFP. In a memorandum for General O.N. Solbert, Boardman emphasized that he did not intend to criticize the personnel of AEFP nor the separate broadcast services. First, AEFP provided "radio of high standard." Second, "the combined operation after D-Day was essential. It placed emphasis in every possible way on the fact that we came to the Continent as one force, one army, with absolute singleness of purpose." In doing this, the "combined radio service was psychologically of great value."

However, times had changed. "That joint operation, as now in effect, provides a program service less than satisfactory to most American listeners. It works against, rather than for, friendly relations with our British Allies."

Boardman related his findings from visits he'd made to the Seventh and Third Army. He included reactions to the AEFP service as a whole, reactions to the AEFP news service and reactions to reception. Overall, the average G.I. had an unfavorable impression of AEFP. When asked if he listened to the service, the normal reply was "You mean that BBC deal?"

Soldiers did "not identify the present set-up as part of a world-wide service by the American Army, designed especially for him as an American fighting man. Neither does he have any feeling that the radio he hears is what Army broadcasting is primarily intended to be - that is, a strong and familiar 'tie with home.' He is more inclined to think of the AEFP as 'another Limey propaganda gag.' "

Part of this feeling resulted from that pesty and constant reference to the AEFP as a service "of the BBC." While Boardman acknowledged that the decision to eliminate this reference from the air would help, it was by no means the complete answer. Regardless of how the service described itself, many potential irritants remained. The G.I.s simply had no use for the British soccer reports, nor the British comics whom they neither liked nor could understand. With few exceptions, the American troops thought British popular music was inferior to their own name bands. Boardman concluded, "In short, he doesn't like most British programs as well as he would American shows."

When a soldier was able to listen to Expeditionary Station, he had a wide range of American programming, thanks to local option periods. However, most of the day, AEFP provided no such option. Even with the operation of AFN stations assigned to each of the American armies, thousands of G.I.s still got most or all their radio from the AEFP broadcasts beamed from England. Despite the efforts of AFN to inject American programming into these AEFP broadcasts, Boardman said that AEFP remained "still basically British in spirit. "It reminds the G.I. listener more of England than of home. Unlike the British soldiers on the Continent, he has no alternative service to listen to. [British soldiers could pick up the General Forces Programme of the British military and the civilian BBC shows.] So, he is inclined to resent it."

Boardman found that the "most consistent and most violent criticism of the AEFP is on the score of news." He outlined several problem areas: First, U.S. soldiers didn't feel they were getting due credit from the BBC for their part in the war. Second, as the Public Information Officers told him, the newscasts mentioned only BBC correspondents. Finally, the G.I.s complained, the BBC placed undue emphasis on British units at the expense of American units, and the greater proportion of the news was British rather than American.

Although the agreement which set up AEFP called for a fifty-fifty news coverage, the troops pointed out that this wasn't fair either. After all, the United States had more troops in Europe than the British. When newscasts mentioned both British and American forces, the British forces were almost always mentioned first. The soldiers with whom Boardman talked, also told of a recent instance where the BBC gave the top news spot to British developments in Greece. That was dumb, Certainly, more important things were going on in other areas. The Battle of the Bulge for one!

Compounding the troops' criticisms was a general dissatisfaction with AEFP's technical side. The signal coming from England often wasn't strong enough for a satisfactory relay over local stations. The Seventh Army troops also complained that their own station had its production operations replaced by the AEFP feed. Letters from the soldiers were unanimous in their preference for the all-American local format in opposition to the relay-type programming.

It was true that Boardman had gathered these soldiers' opinions informally and without scientific research techniques. Yet, he still felt safe in concluding that any more-extensive survey would produce the same results. In any case, in matching the programming effort of the AEFP with the fundamental principles on which AFRS was based, Boardman believed that AEFP just didn't fulfill the mission.

"The news is not consistently American in content nor manner of presentation." he said. "The program schedule is unfamiliar in many respects and use of the medium for orientation and troop information is restricted on the grounds that American orientation material should not be disseminated to British troops."

So, Boardman's recommendation was simple. "Discontinue the AEFP. Extend to the Continent the American Forces Network, as now operated in the United Kingdom. A complete all-British broadcast service to British troops is now available in the General Forces Program of the BBC. No similar all-American program is available to the American troops." The two parallel services should provide their own army its respective radio programming. Such a plan could also provide alternative choices to their own programming if they so wished. Freedom to choose was the key element.

"The undesirable psychological factor in forcing a man to listen to a type of show he doesn't like would be eliminated." Plus, an all-American operation would fulfill the AFRS mission of providing information and orientation materials to American troops on a network basis. Of course, it would also add to the clout of Lewis' and Boardman's organization and it'd redirect broadcasting efforts back to Lewis' original objectives.

Boardman acknowledged the "many complexities involved" in his recommendation. General Eisenhower himself, as Supreme Commander, would have to approve or disapprove his proposal, based on his conclusion that "the original mission of the AEFP is now accomplished.

"For the reasons here indicated, further continuance of the joint service is undesirable. It actually mitigates against the very objectives which inspired its establishment. It engenders Anti-British feelings on the part of American soldiers, and deprives those same soldiers of radio as they prefer to hear it."(10)

THE AEFP LEGACY

Despite Boardman's recommendations to Solbert, and similar ones to Hayes and AFN the next day, AEFP had not done all that badly. The service had provided news and entertainment to several million soldiers. It contributed to the good morale of the troops during the most difficult periods following initial landings or the occasional military setbacks. Perhaps more important, during times when a lull took place in the fighting, radio was there. Its music, drama and comedy helped the men relax with at least a brief respite from the serious business at hand.

Gorham was "accused of something by somebody at least once a week throughout the lifetime of the AEFP."

One of the easiest criticisms to explain, if hardest to do anything about, was "Radio Arnheim." The Germans would pick up AEFP broadcasts and relay them back to the Allied troops exactly like the mobile stations were doing. The only difference was that the Germans would slip in bits of propaganda. Aided by AEFP's "precise timings," the German station "did it very cleverly indeed. 'Radio Arnheim's' news was often mistaken for ours!" When someone would call up asking why AEFP was saying that Montgomery was a better General than Bradley or Patton, Gorham would have to explain that Arnheim had "done it again!"

Despite such problems, Gorham states, "it was a job worth doing all the same. We all thought it the best entertainment program ever put on the air. Of course it ought to have been, with all the material from three countries that it had to draw upon. It did seem to be a godsend to the troops."

The evidence came, just as it did for the AFRS operations, from the soldiers themselves. From all over the world, first-hand testimonies poured in from the front and from troops when they returned home. Gorham found it surprising how many men "appreciated the idea behind the service and thought better of their allies because of it, thus justifying SHAEF's original idea. We knew that a mention of a unit in our 'Combat Diary' had an amazing effect in raising the unit's morale."

Thus, despite Lewis' concern about the British control of AEFP, the service did accomplish General Eisenhower's aim.

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(1) Gorham, pp 146-49.
(2) Ibid.
(3) Gorham, pp 1476-47.
(4) Major Arthur Goodfriend to John Hayes, July 6, 1944; Lieutenant Colonel Tom Lewis to All Personnel of the AFRS, Military and Civilian, July 20, 1944.
(5) Gorham, p 152.
(6) Ibid., pp 151-52.
(7) Ibid., p 152.
(8) Ibid., p 147.
(9) Ibid.
(10) Lieutenant Colonel True Boardman to Brigadier General O.N. Solbert, January 22, 1945.